AUG 1 1976

Schweiker Shift No Surprise in Hometown

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Special to The New York Times

NORRISTOWN, Pa. — No-body here, not even Senator Richard S. Schweiker's birthplace was surprised to hear that he had agreed to serve as Ronald Reagan's running mate if the former California Governor won the Republican Presidential nomination.

Lester Boyd, a local businessman, thought that the decision was "asinine"; William Gault, a college president, called it "a bit curious," and Robert J. McCracken, the publisher of the daily newspaper here, wondered if perhaps Mr. Reagan "had lost his mind."

But none of these people were surprised by the Senator's decision two weeks ago to recant some of his liberal positions and align himself with a man who was at the other end of the ideological spectrum.

"We elected [illegible] Representative [illegible] conservative," [illegible] long-time friend of Mr. Schweiker's affluent family, said. "Then he went down to Washington and went the other way. So it's no news to me to hear that he wants to turn around."

The Senator explained his philosophical [illegible] as an effort to adjust to an ever-changing constituency: first, that of a conservative district here on the banks of the Schuylkill then, with his election to the Senate in 1966, that more moderate constituency of the State of Pennsylvania.

Now, as a potential Vice-Presidential candidate, he has decided that he should once again move to the right, a direction he believes the country is taking.

Whether or not he and Mr. Reagan become the Republican nominees, it seems clear that neither of them has helped himself in this little industrial town on the outskirts of Philadelphia.

Those who were drawn to the Californian were offended by his willingness to accept a man with liberal credentials. Those who were drawn to Mr. Schweiker were offended by his liaison with Mr. Reagan.

But nobody was surprised. In fact, there are quite a few people in Norristown who are laughing.

"Is Schweiker a liberal or a conservative?" one local joke begins.

"It all depends."

"On what?"

"On w[illegible]."

Joke Is Popular

The joke is playing well at the American Legion and the Knights of [illegible] halls, gathering [illegible] for the blue-collar [illegible] of Norristown who ran [illegible] Mr. Schweiker's [illegible] campaign for Congress.

He was a popular young man, they said—hard working, apparently unspoiled by his father's success as a tile manufacturer and motivated by enormous ambition.

He won that election by defeating the incumbent Republican Representative — John A. LaFore Jr.—in his party's primary. He won, Mr. Boyd said, because he "got to the right" of his opponent.

"You'd have thought he was Robert Taft," he said. "I liked him, liked him a lot."

Most of that affection has faded. Like many other Republicans in the 13th Congressional District, Mr. Boyd, who ran Dwight D. Eisenhower's campaign here in 1952, was shocked and disappointed by the metamorphosis that occurred in Mr. Schweiker over the years.

"The movers and shakers here are conservatives," said a local man who has watched the politics of the district for a long time. "They are the ones who put him in office, and they feel he has deserted them. They all look as though their hearts have been cut out."

Mr. McCracken, for instance, a publisher of The [illegible] Times Herald, on the verge of endorsing Mr. Reagan in his newspaper when the Californian announced his choice for Vice President.

"Either way, somebody changed his spots," he said. "It lacked any integrity. I'm leaning toward Ford."

Mr. Pettit, the president of Ursinus College, a small liberal arts school near here, said that the Senator had been of great assistance to his institution, "but my objection to him is that he counts the votes before the principles."

"I prefer someone who has principles of his own and is guided by them, not a chameleon," he said.

Mr. Boyd delivered his final word on the subject. "It's hard to say which one I disrespect more," he said. "Reagan's a fool, and Schweiker's an opportunist, but they're both pols, so I'm not surprised."